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ART. V. — HERDER.

II.

IN writing a history of German ideas, manners, and customs, it is impossible to lay too great a stress upon the close connection subsisting between the rise of German literature and the one great general principle which pervaded the whole of the eighteenth century, and which was, as we all know, the intellectual, moral, and social emancipation of the individual.

The entire age had been employed in resistance against every possible form of authority, whether Church, State, or Convention. Dogmas had become especially obnoxious, and, however skilfully they might be disguised, were speedily detected. For a time, at least, the adversaries of all established order were to be conquerors in this protracted struggle, and the close of the century was destined to witness the ruin of the traditional state as well as of positive religion in France, and of scholastic philosophy in Germany. Kant exercised the same influence over thought as the Revolution did over society. The individual was, or believed himself, forever released from the yoke of authority; everything was to begin again from the beginning; nor is this the place to narrate how many were the stones which had to be borrowed from the antique structure in order to prop up the new edifice. In order, however, to arrive at this result, Germany struck out for herself a very different road from that which France had taken. It was by so-called Pietism, by an appeal to inward faith, that the struggle against established religious authority began, and it was a lawful sovereign who originated the commencement of the modern German state. Frederick the Second and Weisse did much towards clearing the way for the friends of enlightenment and French propaganda. But what is of still greater importance is the warfare which took place on the field of literature; for — this point cannot be too forcibly urged — in spite of the events and transformations which convulsed Germany, her real history lay in her literature until 1848, if, indeed, we admit that history means the series of consecutive metamorphoses experienced by that living organism which we call a nation.

Already, towards the commencement of the eighteenth century, a movement of resistance had made itself felt at different times against authority in literary matters, however firmly established it might seem. This authority, we are aware, was no other than that French classicism of which Boileau's *Art Poétique* contained the code, and the tragedy of the *Grand Siècle* represented the most perfect form, and which people were anxiously endeavoring to imitate in a language and with a natural inspiration utterly at variance with, and incapable of accommodating themselves to, its requirements. It was to Lessing that the task fell of freeing Germany from the despotism of a foreign rule ; which he, however, accomplished, not by dethroning that authority to which Frenchmen had appealed, but, on the contrary, by re-establishing it in its true acceptance. He did, in fact, for Aristotle what Luther had done for the Bible. Still, he did not submit to Aristotle merely because he was Aristotle, but because he recognized truth in him, " a truth as sure as that of Euclid." He would fain have paused there, satisfied with having freed the laws of penmanship from the hoary overgrowth of time, false interpretation, and erroneous application ; he never had the slightest intention of attacking the laws themselves. But however great a man's genius may be, he cannot stem at his will the current which carries away a whole generation with it ; particularly when he has himself cleared the road for it by removing the obstacles which stood in its way. Every Mirabeau finds a Danton to outstep him. Lessing had claimed the rights of individual genius to modify rule, and five years had hardly elapsed since the publication of his *Dramaturgie* when the literary *Montagne* already urged a radical abolishment of all literary legislation, and proclaimed the rights of genius to absolute self-government. Reform had drifted into Revolution, and Herder was marching at the head of the insurgents.

Herder, the dates of whose life and the tenor of whose intellect placed him midway between Lessing and Goethe, — Herder, who was neither a critic, like the former, nor a poet, like the latter, but who detected the hidden powers which were at work in history with a keener insight than either, — Herder was the real originator of the German civilization of the nine-

teenth century, the chief characteristic of which lies in its historical point of view. All that had been done in Germany previous to him since the awakening of the nation towards 1750 was mere preparatory work. Klopstock had succeeded in rehabilitating natural feeling and spontaneous enthusiasm which had been stifled beneath the formalism of all kinds then oppressing the German intellect. Wieland had done his best to import and acclimatize English and French culture. Winckelmann had, if we may be permitted to use the expression, blown away the dust from the ancients, thus revealing to view the purity of their outlines, buried as they were beneath a dense layer of rubbish.* Lessing had exercised a purely negative influence; he had removed obstacles, cleared the ground, and sorted the imported merchandise, carefully rejecting what was not of pure alloy. It was with Herder that Germany's positive co-operation in the century's labors began. He it was who first gave utterance to the German idea, who began to form that capital which was to be Germany's contribution to the work of humanity. No one, Kant, perhaps, alone excepted, has contributed a larger amount to this stock; nor did any one ever exercise greater or more lasting influence over an age, a nation, or the world at large than Herder, who, like the genuine rebel he was, began by turning the then reigning science and literature upside down, as Kant did with the philosophical speculation of his time, and the French Revolution with the political world. Before showing this influence exercised by Herder over his contemporaries, and tracing its vestiges through after-generations, let us see what was the nature of the new principle applied by him to theology, history, and poetry. It was the superiority of nature over civilization, and of intuition over reason. It was in the continual opposition of synthesis to analysis, of the individual to rule, of spontaneous impulse to conscious action, of organism to mechanism, of development to legislation; in a word, it was in placing the *feri* above the

* Winckelmann's "History of Art" already forcibly urges the idea of development, showing the coherence between the literature, the state, and the art of the ancients. From this point of view, therefore, it may be looked upon as an anticipation of Herder; but it was not this part of the work which impressed his contemporaries; it was by his new definition of the ideal of ancient art that he struck them and formed a school.

facere that lay the zest of Herder's ideas, and the basis of the school of "original geniuses" he was leading to battle against the religious, literary, and scientific rationalism of the age.

No man finds his starting-point within himself. The starting-point of German civilization lay in France, as that of French civilization had lain in England. It was more particularly from Rousseau that Herder received his first impulse. The reaction against the exclusive worship of reason had begun precisely in those countries which had been foremost in establishing it. It was the land of Pope and Johnson which gave birth to Young and Macpherson; and the works of Lowth and Wood struck out in literature that path on which Rousseau was to lead the latter half of the century in political and social matters. Mankind was to return to Nature, to that good parent whose works had become disfigured by the manners and customs of polished, refined society. It is difficult for us in our days to form any adequate conception of the effect produced by Rousseau's discourse on "Inequality" at the time it appeared. "It is impossible to speak otherwise than with secret veneration of these lofty ideas and sublime thoughts," exclaimed Lessing, then a young man and already very little disposed to be sentimental. Kant actually forgot his daily walk while he perused *Émile*. In my chapter on Herder's life I have already quoted the enthusiastic verses he addressed to Rousseau while yet a student, in which he chooses him for "his guide through life." Even Schiller himself, although younger by fifteen years than Herder, compared Rousseau to Socrates. "Rousseau, who perished by the hand of Christians; Rousseau, who would fain make human beings out of Christians." One must read of the impression felt by the youth of Germany on reading Rousseau, as described by Goethe. What it was in France is well known. We smile at those English parks which replaced Le Notre's stately avenues, at the farm-yards established in royal demesnes, and at the queens who turned themselves into dairy-maids; and on beholding the great ladies of the eighteenth century giving the breast to their infants amidst a group of *élégants*, we are often tempted to see more affectation in it than there really was. Everything in this powdered, painted company had become so artificial that any excess of naturalism appeared as

a deliverance, passed for a protest against unnatural refinement, and really was a thoroughly justified reaction against the opposite extreme. Nothing, indeed, could be more justifiable than Rousseau's opposition to Voltaire and the Encyclopedists; for what was it but the rebellion of Feeling against Reason, which till then had restrained and enthralled it; Feeling, which burst the tight ligatures by which men had sought to confine their hearts, in the effort to shake off Reason's yoke and obtain breathing-room for herself?

The spirit of the *Encyclopédie* was at that time reigning supreme in Germany also. The great Frederick, Nicolai's followers, Wieland himself, were confirmed rationalists at heart. We find common-sense, not sentiment, ruling all things, even up to Lessing, and this spirit in which everything is clearness, precision, and accuracy leaves no room for obscure twilight. Now, this same precise, matter-of-fact, uncompromising thing we denominate common-sense never did engender poetry, and *chiar'oscuro* will exist in the depths of man's nature. Such things as vague apprehensions, presentiments, *rêverie*, forecast lie dormant within the innermost recesses of the human soul; nay, form, mayhap, the most precious of its treasures. If we seek to light up these dark corners by admitting the sun's rays too fully, and so hunt from their haunts the spirits which have taken up their abode there, we often only succeed in driving them to take refuge in mystery elsewhere, and to assume the form of a grosser superstition; or else they leave behind them a blank void, together with a painful longing to fill it up anew. And herein lay Herder's right of protest against the prose of common-sense, against the moralizing didacticism of German poetry, from which even Lessing was unable entirely to free himself, and against the petrified forms of citizen life, religion, and science in Germany. Whereas Rousseau had sought chiefly to re-establish Nature's rights in social matters, Herder wished to do so in things of the intellect. Here resides his originality. It was by this he developed and continued what Rousseau had begun, and it was by this that he was finally induced to turn round upon Rousseau and react against him. While searching for Nature's unconscious proceeding in her intellectual creation of what we call language, religion, and

poetry, he finished by surprising the secret of her process in creating society and the state, and found this process to be the very antipodes of the *Contrat Social*.

Friedrich Schlegel was wont to call Herder the "mythologist of German literature"; nor could a better name have been found for him. He not only sought after the prophetic part of human nature, but sought for it in a prophetic way. We have no right to expect from Herder, the scholar, a decided method, any more than a definite dogma from Herder, the believer, an established system from Herder, the critic, or a precise form from Herder, the writer. While Lessing's clear intellect is employed in portioning out the ground with strict impartiality, drawing the boundaries between science and art, and forbidding poetry to trespass upon the domain of painting, Herder seeks poetry in all things, introducing it even into philosophy and science, while as a counterbalance he puts philosophy and science into his own poetry. He had the most delicate perception ever known for detecting and relishing the poetry of every nation, age, and description, added to an extremely pliable imagination, which rendered their assimilation easy to him. And when I say pliable, I do not mean creative or tempered; for he never himself attains that *ἐνάργεια* (*evidenza*) he so greatly appreciates in others. Not one of his poems has become popular; not one of his personages is living; not a phrase of his has become proverbial. "My muse is wanting in that charming roundness with which you deceive the world," he himself wrote to Goethe. Herder abounds in ideas; but in unclassified ideas, without order or system. We feel that he preferred generalities to facts; hence arose his chief defect,—that of drawing hasty conclusions and forming superficial opinions. He never had the patience to collect solid materials as a foundation before proceeding to generalize. We owe to Herder all the numerous histories of poetry, languages, religions, and even of legislations which our century has produced; his own "Ideas of a Philosophy of History" (1784), unfinished, diffusely written in a loose, unconnected style, the style of a seer rather than of a thinker, still less of an historian, very insufficient if we look upon them as researches, form a book which is totally antiquated as far as form and ma-

terials are concerned ; but as for the thoughts contained in it, it seems written but yesterday ; it might easily be taken for a sketch from the pen of M. Taine.

Herder's very universality itself was injurious to him. He embraced too wide an extent to allow of his grasping anything firmly ; or, as the French have it, *il embrasse trop pour bien étreindre*. His ever-wandering eye never could restrict itself to one narrow spot, and the flame of his enthusiasm bore a greater resemblance to the burning of a steppe than to the concentrated, persistent glow of a thoroughly heated fireplace. He caught glimpses, — we might almost say had visions, — of a genius upon all subjects, mastering none completely ; and thus, while able to give the architect the most valuable suggestions, he was himself utterly at a loss to construct the smallest edifice. No man ever scattered abroad a greater quantity of fruit-bearing seeds than he ; yet at the close of his life he found that he had not tilled a single corner of his own field according to rule. It is undeniable that his works are more remarkable for their variety than for the profundity of the learning they contain, as Herder himself was endowed with more imagination than good sense, more ardor than thoroughness.

It was precisely these defects, nevertheless, which determined his immense influence. He was certainly one of the greatest incentive powers the world has ever known. By dint of analyzing human nature and introducing into history the division of labor, people had come to such a point that, as Mephistopheles has it, "They held the parts in their hand, the intellectual link alone being wanting." It was Herder's unmethodical, visionary imagination which discovered the failing link, and reunited what intelligence had severed. "Everything that man undertakes to produce, whether by action, word, or in whatsoever way, ought to spring from the union of all his faculties ; all that is isolated is condemnable." These were the words in which Goethe summed up the fundamental idea which inspired Hamann, that prophet of the gospel of nature, the mentor and initiator of Herder ; an idea which his disciple adopted and adhered to steadily through life, and of which he became the missionary. Nothing, he would say, is

in reality isolated, and, just as each individual sense is assisted by the four others in the perception of any object which absorbs our attention, so do the memory and the imagination likewise co-operate with the judgment and perception in acquiring a knowledge of things. This union of all the faculties, this entireness of the individual, is what we must endeavor to recover, such as it was in primitive ages ere abstract rules had been thought of; times when each individual acted, thought, and wrote according to inspiration. "What is it in Homer that compensates for his ignorance of the rules deduced from the study of his work by Aristotle, and what in Shakespeare that makes up for his direct violation even of these laws of criticism? The unanimous answer to this question will be Genius."

Herder carried these words of Hamann's to very great extremes, and made originality the very corner-stone of his system, if the word "system" be applicable to any one so thoroughly unsystematic as Herder. "What do my profession and my views concern all the æsthetic school, newspapers, sects, and rubrics of fashionable task within and without Germany? . . . I have endeavored to form my taste after more than one nation, epoch, and language, and may therefore claim the right of writing as I like for my own people, age, and tongue." Thus we already see individual fancy elevated to the rank of indisputable sovereignty. Not long after young Goethe will proclaim in the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* (1772) that "original genius" has its "own demeanor, expression, tone, system, and dress," and that "spectators are called upon to respect its ways." It is easy to perceive that all this differs widely from Lessing's manner of thinking, who was still occupied in laying down poetical rules to control individual caprice. Now, this much-vaunted originality not being of frequent occurrence in the essentially artificial society and poetry of those times, it became necessary either to ascend to epochs which preceded all civilization, in other words to primitive nations, or to descend to those popular strata of the existing period which had as yet escaped the contagion of our corrupt culture, in order to find it in all its purity. Herder, as we see, was a species of literary Rousseau; he may be said

to have renovated and regenerated the poetry of his time by immersing it in the only true sources of all poetry,—nature and the popular element.

Herder, who had already begun to bring primitive poetry into notice in his *Fragments* and *Sylvæ* (1767–68), did so henceforth still more forcibly in his *Blätter für Deutsche Art und Kunst* (1773) with the aid and support of his disciple, Goethe. He it was who first established a fact subsequently confirmed by historical discovery, namely, that poetry always preceded prose in the annals of mankind, and who found out the superiority of ages in which genuine, entire natures still existed.

“At the flourishing periods of elegant prose, nothing but art can prosper in poetry. Later on, we find mere versified philosophy or half-way poetry. On the other hand, the language of those times, when words like society had not yet been divided into nobles, middle class, and plebeians, nor had prose been sifted, was the richest for poetical purpose. Our tongue, compared with the idiom of the savage, seems adapted rather for reflection than for the senses or the imagination. The rhythm of popular verse is so delicate, so rapid, so precise, that it is no easy matter for us bookworms to detect it with our eyes; but do not imagine it to have been so difficult for those living populations who listened to, instead of reading it, who were accustomed to the sound of it from their infancy, who themselves sang it, and whose ear had been formed by its cadence.

“Nothing is stronger, more persistent in duration, quicker, or more delicate than the sense of hearing. How long it retains what it has once thoroughly seized! How forcibly, how vividly, how richly do things we have learnt in our earliest childhood, with our first attempts at speech, return upon us in after-life with the impressions of the living world!”

We find this priest of nature continually and persistently contemplating primitive ages, and incessantly opposing the primitive to the conventional world.

“Travellers’ narratives tell us with what powers and energy avages invariably express themselves: defining what they have to say in a clear, vivid, comprehensible way; having a direct, accurate feeling of the object they have in speaking;

being disturbed by no shades of ideas, no half-way thoughts, or alphabetic and symbolic reason, of which there is not a trace in their language; as yet untainted by the corruption of refinement, of servile considerations, of a timid, grovelling prudence, of the premeditation which takes away self-confidence; blissful in happy ignorance of all the artifices which debilitate the intellect,—they seize the entire thought by the entire word, and *vice versa* the word by the thought. Either they remain silent, or speak at the moment their interest has been aroused with unprepared self-possession, with a firmness and spontaneous beauty which we Europeans, with all our study, are forced to admire, and can never ourselves hope to attain. Our pedantic bookworms, who compile and patch up everything previously, and are constrained to learn their speeches by heart in order to be able to stammer them forth methodically; our pedagogues, sacristans, half-way scholars, apothecaries, and all such as hurry through the sanctuary of science without gathering anything from it, unless, indeed, it be at the last the capability of speaking like Shakespeare's Launcelots, policemen, and grave-diggers,—in other words, without any propriety in the choice of their expressions, in a random, incoherent manner, resembling the wanderings of delirium,—what are such “cultivated people” compared with savages? Whoever seeks among us the traces of a firm, precise language must look for it elsewhere! Children as yet uncontaminated, women, men possessed of natural good sense, men formed in the school of action rather than of reflection still are the best, or rather the only real orators of our times. . . . It was the poet's, the bard's, and the scholar's mission, in the days of old, to unite beauty, dignity, and melody with the self-confident assurance of popular speech. Having once brought the lips and the soul thus into close connection, that they might mutually assist and support each other, instead of leading one another astray, they brought forth those marvellous works which are known to us as the lays of aëdes, bards, and minstrels. Homer's rhapsodies and Ossian's lays were improvisations, for at that time improvisation alone existed. Ossian was succeeded, faintly and from afar, it is true, but nevertheless succeeded, by minstrels, until art came and extinguished nature altogether. Then it

was that men commenced torturing themselves from their tenderest infancy by learning prosodic metres in foreign languages, to which both our ear and our nature are obtuse ; to compose elaborately according to set laws, of which a very small proportion are acknowledged by genius to be dictated by nature ; to make verses upon subjects which were capable of inspiring neither their thoughts, their feelings, nor their imagination ; to counterfeit passions they did not experience, to imitate faculties of the mind which are no longer ours ; and thus all things became false, effeminate, and refined. Even the clearest heads got confused, lost their sureness of eye, of hand, of thought, and of utterance, and consequently all genuine truth and real animation. Thus all was lost. Poetry, which ought, by right, to have been the firmest and most spontaneous of the offspring of the mind, became the lamest, the unsteadiest, and the least sure-footed, and poems dwindled into school-boys' revised and corrected themes. No doubt it is only natural, such being the views and feelings of our times, that we should choose out for our admiration what is artificial rather than what is natural in the works of the ancients, and that we are likely to find too much or too little art in them, according to the humor we may happen to be in. What we are least likely to discover is what appeals loudly to us from every page they have ever written,—the spirit of nature. . . . Were they to rise again from the dead, and hear themselves read and praised, Homer and Ossian would often marvel at much that is attributed to them, as well as at much that is denied them ; at what is added ; and what entirely escapes attention. It is true that our minds of to-day are differently formed, owing to the education of our youth for many past generations. We are accustomed to reflect and analyze so much that we hardly see or feel any more ; we no longer poetize in or on the living world ; our poetry is not the result of the contact of objects with our soul ; we manufacture themes artificially, as well as the manner of treating them ; and we have practised this for so long, so frequently, and we begin to do so at so early an age, that a free education would have small chance of success with us : for how should the lame walk upright ? Hence the want of firmness, boldness, and well-defined

yet rounded outlines in all our modern poems, which the first sketch can alone bestow, and which no amount of after-work, aided by the compass, will ever give. Our poetical labor would evidently produce the same effect upon Homer and Ossian which the vacillating lines drawn by the trembling hand of an apprentice would upon a Raphael or an Apelles, accustomed to reveal their genius in the roughest sketch."

Words like these naturally fell like a thunderbolt upon that eighteenth century, so self-satisfied, so vain of the great progress it had achieved, and of the high culture it had attained. Versification as an art had been taught to such perfection, the criterion by which the merits and demerits of poetry were to be measured had been so accurately defined, poetry itself was so easily learned and taught, that the world was completely dumbfounded at this strange enthusiasm for miserable, despised savages. Moreover, Herder added practice to theory. Already, during his stay in Strasburg, he had begun with Goethe to search for popular songs, and great was his delight when he was able to send one to his affianced bride which he had gathered from the mouths of the people. No book, since the appearance of Percy's "Antient Reliques," had produced so great a sensation as the *Stimmen der Völker*, a series of volumes containing popular poems, published by Herder in 1778, and which became the model for all the numerous collections of the kind which have come out during the nineteenth century. Herder was eminently gifted for work of this sort. His delicate ear immediately distinguished the false from the true; it instantaneously seized the characteristics of melody, metre, and subject, while the pliability of his talent enabled him to render the whole in such forms of the German idiom as approached nearest to the original. These *Stimmen der Völker* contain specimens taken from every nation on the globe, every period of history, every class of society, written in every possible metre and on every imaginable subject. No one could have been better able to assimilate to himself, even occasionally to guess at the original tone of such productions, than Herder. He had no knowledge whatever of Sanscrit; yet, on reading *Sakuntala* in an English version towards the close of his career, he at once detected its true form, however transformed by the

translation. The last and the most popular work he published, the *Cid*, a cycle of romances, was made from a French translation; and yet, whatever syllable-counters may say, its whole tone is deliciously and surprisingly Spanish, *chevaleresque*. and Catholic, like that of all true Castilian romances, although the outward form does not exactly render that of the originals. Surely Herder was not the first to point out the merits of popular verse, nor did he attempt for a moment to make the world believe him to be ignorant of the passages relating to this question which are to be found in Montaigne's writings; he was wont even readily to quote them. But there is surely a very great difference between a few hurried glimpses caught *en passant* and a whole literary life dedicated to the cause. There is also a great difference between the effects produced by a vehement and persistent vindication of this cause in an age when it must of necessity at first sight have seemed paradoxical, and in which it ultimately succeeded in gaining the upper hand, and those produced by a scarcely noticed allusion of about half a page, written precisely at the time when the opposite tendency was about to triumph for the space of two centuries. Here are those charming words which Montaigne penned on the eve of the most despotic rule of artificial poetry the world has ever known:—

“La poésie populaire et purement naturelle a des naïvetés et graces par où elle se compare à la principale beauté de la poésie parfaite selon l'art, comme il se veoid ez villanelles de Gascoigne et aux chansons qu'on nous rapporte des nations qui n'ont cognoissance d'aulcune science, n'y même d'escripture. . . . À certaines mesures basses on la peult juger par les préceptes et par l'art, mais la bonne, la supresme, la divine est audessus des règles et de la raison.”*

To these lines penned by the great sceptic, who, from the retirement of his retreat, had seen, heard, thought, and felt everything, Herder adds the following no less characteristic

* “Popular and purely natural poetry has a simplicity and grace by which it may compare advantageously with what forms the principal beauty in perfect poetry written according to the chief rules of art, as we may see in the *Villanelles* of Gascony and the songs brought to us from nations unacquainted with any science or even writing. . . . It may be judged of by precept and art at certain low standards, but the really excellent, the loftiest, the truly divine is above all rules and beyond all reasoning.”

words: "Poetry lived in the ears of the people, on the lips and in the harps of living bards; it sang of history, of the events of the day, of mysteries, miracles, and signs. It was the flower of a nation's character, language, and country; of its occupations, its prejudices, its passions, its pretensions, and its soul." The whole modern theory concerning epic poetry is contained in embryo in these words; yet Herder goes still farther, and formulates it so distinctly that F. A. Wolff had nothing to do but to develop and establish it firmly by means of that detailed and material system of argumentation which made him the true father of the Homeric idea as comprehended by our age.

"The greatest among Greek bards," says Herder, "was also the greatest among popular poets. His sublime work is no epopee; it is the *Epos*, the story, the legend, the living history of the people. He did not sit himself down on velvet cushions to compose an epic poem in twice twenty-four cantos, according to the rules of Aristotle."

Thus we see that Homer was no longer considered by Herder in the light of a *summa vis et quasi mensura ingenii humani*; but that in his eyes, as in those of Wolff, he was "the collective voice of singing antiquity," and his poems an "epopee issuing from the innumerable legends of the past." He does not yet quite give up Homer's individuality, it is true, but he looks upon him simply as "the most gifted poetical head of his age and nation, and deems that none of those who strove to imitate were able to equal him." But he did not seek for "the elements of his happy genius" beyond the limits of nature and of the age which formed him. "The better I become acquainted with those times the better I am able to explain Homer to myself; and the more, also, the inclination to judge him as the poet of all times and nations, and treat him as though he belonged by right of citizenship to my own time and people, disappears." We almost think we hear M. Taine and his theories of *milieu*, time, and race. Besides, will not Friedrich Schlegel say the same thing better and more clearly? Are not Wolff's *Prolegomena* contained in these words, just as Niebuhr's "Legendary History of the Kings of Rome," and the mythopœic faculty as defined and exhibited by Ottfried Müller and

Grote, to be found in other pages of Herder's works? And then people come and tell one that all this is plagiarism! That Vico said it all far better fifty years before Herder! Eternal mania of small minds, who thirst after the satisfaction of picking great men to pieces by proving, black on white, that they were not the only ones, nor even the first, to proclaim a truth! But, pray, who is not aware that, long ere Christopher Columbus came into the world, many men had dreamt of and foretold the existence of a new world? And is this any reason for depriving the man whose undeviating faith, whose courage, firmness, devotion, and genius accomplished the great work, of the glory and honor of having discovered America? Vico was undoubtedly one of the greatest minds which have ever existed; his knowledge and erudition were very vast; he foresaw and foretold a number of theories and laws which we now acknowledge to be right; but he nevertheless exercised no influence whatever over the world at large. Whether the fault lay in the undigested chaos of facts and ideas under which these atoms of gold-dust lie hidden, or in the eccentric form he has given them; or whether it be that the world, accustomed to turn a listening ear to England and France, disdained to learn from the Neapolitan thinker, certain it is that the *Scienza Nuova* was utterly unknown in Europe till our century; it was as certainly unknown to Herder. Now, great thinkers live in posterity, not only in virtue of their own intrinsic value, but also in virtue of the influence they have exercised. Were a poem incontestably superior to the *Iliad* in beauty and perfection to be discovered to-day in Polynesia, it never could be to mankind what the *Iliad* has been; so Vico likewise, in spite of the perspicacity of his genius, worthy of all admiration, never can be to history what Herder was. Even Young himself, whose book upon "Original Works" had prepared the way for Wood's celebrated volume upon "Homer's Original Genius," which in its turn led the way to F. A. Wolff's *Prolegomena*, — even Young himself has never been seriously looked upon as having inspired Herder. Herder's ideas immediately penetrated the whole nation; its youth eagerly caught at them; in a very few years even the schools adopted them, and Germany sent forth their rays to the rest of Europe, while England will

hardly admire and tolerate the ideas of Young and Wood even in our days.

But Herder not only discovered true poetry in the distant ages of Homer and the cloudy isles of Ossian, he found it out in modern times, in his own nation, lending a ready ear to the simple ditties of the woodcutter and the peasant, of the journeyman and the soldier, of the hunter and the shepherd. Germany owes the revival of the *Lied*, or song, entirely to Herder and to the *Stimmen der Völker*. When we read the verses Goethe wrote at Leipzig,—i. e. before meeting with Herder,—we may well be permitted to doubt whether Germany would ever have possessed those unrivalled pearls, his little songs of love, addressed to Friederike and Lili, if he had not known him. It is at any rate very certain that it would not have had either the *Erlkönig* or *Lenore*.

“What is the *Lied*,” Herder inquired, even before he had communicated so many graceful specimens of this form of poem in his *Stimmen der Völker*,—“what is the *Lied*? It is neither a sonnet nor a madrigal, poems for the study and the saloon; it is no composition for painting with harmonious coloring; light and brilliancy are not its merits. . . . The essence of the *Lied* is *song*, not *painting*. Its perfection resides in the melodious course of a passion or a sentiment. . . . If this melody be wanting in a *Lied*, if it have not the poetical modulation, the right tone, it may contain ever so many images, it may be graceful, it may have coloring, it never can be a *Lied*!”

“Poetry was no longer the exclusive inheritance of a few cultivated minds, but a general gift of all nations,” says Goethe in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, with reference to the new ideas started by Herder; nor must we forget that these ideas were those of a young man of twenty-four. That general philosophical view of the world at which most men do not arrive before the age of thirty was Herder’s when he left the University and was but twenty years old. Even his maturer writings—those at least which have had a marked influence—were conceived in his youth. The *Stimmen der Völker*, which he published twenty years afterwards, were his favorite occupation when at Riga; and the power of their action upon German lyrics is

quite incalculable. It was at once the beginning of comparative literary history and of German philology.

Herder's universality seems surprising even in our days. Not satisfied with revealing Ossian and the Scotch ballads, Spanish romances and Italian *stornelli*, he had recourse to the East and even to America and Australia for the rough accents of savage verse. He was forever laboring to show that "popular legends, stories, and mythologies are the result of popular belief, ideas, faculties, instincts, and proceed from times when men dream because they know not, believe because they see not, and act with their whole, their undivided, and uncultivated soul. . . . This is therefore a noble subject for the historian of mankind, for the poet, the critic, and the philosopher." The history of the human mind is called upon to seek and reunite those poetical traditions in which nations have depicted themselves, just as natural history describes herbs and animals. And all this in the very midst of the eighteenth century; that is to say, at the time when men's pretensions to create by means of formulas learnt by heart and according to taught processes had reached their highest pitch; at a time which manufactured epopees, religions, political constitutions, and civil codes! In order to realize to ourselves this strong contrast with the age, we need only compare for a moment what Herder and Lessing have said concerning *fables*, and to see the distance which separates the last-born of the rationalistic from the first-born of the historical age. This minor category of poem which the poetical genius of Lafontaine had transformed, and which the first German critics, who ventured to shake off the French yoke at the commencement of the century, had presented as the highest kind of poetry, — because it unites *utile dulci*, and that alone of all kinds it combines the true and the marvellous! — this fable, we say, was still defined in the following terms by Lessing, as an intentional form of moral instruction: "If we reduce a general proposition to a particular case, lending it reality and making a story out of it in which the general proposition may be recognized by means of intuition, we call this a fable." Herder, on the contrary, would have all that is conventional excluded from it, and not only all that is conventional, but even every striking point,

every ingenious sentence; "because," he says, "a sublime *naïveté* forms the gracefulness of fables, as simplicity is nature's grace." He likewise protests against animals having thoughts lent them of any kind, or being made to play any sort of part, by the writer of fables, without inquiring whether or no these thoughts or actions belong to the character or habits of such animals. The primitive poet observed animal life, and if he lent them speech and reason, it was by the *analagon rationis humanæ*. "In ancient fables animals act because all which in nature produces effects appears to primitive humanity to act. . . . It is analogy which is the parent of poetry in fables, not abstraction, still less a dry deduction from the general to the particular." Therefore, also, like Lessing, he advocates a return to primitive fable, but he desires that it should be made by means of actual experience, i. e. by the simple observation of animals in real life, without any preconceived ideas. For "the fable rests on nature's eternal consistency and constancy. . . . Its characters are types. . . . The more natural the state in which a people lived, the more it liked fables." All this shows how far we are from the delicious *tableaux de genre* which Lafontaine painted under the name of fables, as well as from Lessing's concise, epigrammatic satires. In Herder's eyes, fables originally were, and would again become, were we to live less artificially, the poetical illustration of a lesson of experience by means of a characteristic trait drawn from animal life and developed by analogy. Now, Herder made this refutation of the mechanical theories then reigning throughout Europe from his point of view, i. e. that of poetical, spontaneous creation without special aim, not only on the domain of the fable, but on that of every other kind of poetry, small or large. To him material extension was of no consequence in works of art. For him Raphael's tiny painting of Ezekiel's Vision has no less value than the Stanze in the Vatican; and he deemed that as much genius might be shown in a *Lied* as in an epopee. He studied the nature of epigrams as he had done that of fables, of the drama as of the epic poetry of the ancients; and to say the truth, it was he who showed his country the true Homer and the true Sophocles, as he was

likewise to show it the true Shakespeare; the whole of the antique world has been looked upon with a different eye since Herder.

He opposed his own less refined conception of the ancient world, not only to the Alexandrian rather than Athenian conventional antiquity which found favor with the French and with Wieland, but also indirectly and half unconsciously to Winckelmann's somewhat tight-laced idealism, in viewing the ancients with the eye of a realist. It was he who taught Goethe to laugh at powdered and patched Alcestes dressed in hoops, as he did in his poem *Götter, Helden, und Wieland*. It was from Herder likewise that Friedrich Schlegel took his ideas concerning Greek epic poetry. Herder alone, in opposition to the entire age in which he lived, protested against comparisons between the ancient and modern world, thus anticipating in fact Schiller's admirable essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry." He strenuously opposed all imitation of ancient poetry; he fought with the exclusiveness of a reformer against the preference for Roman to Greek antiquity, which had been current for a century. He absolutely refused to see anything beyond an artificial imitation in Roman literature, which he considered utterly unworthy of comparison with the spontaneous, original productions of Greek authors. Virgil, in his eyes, was nothing but a learned, studied, self-conscious court poet; the *Æneid* a species of refined *Henriade*; and indeed I am afraid he was very near treating the author of the *Églogues* as that "wretched Virgil" he was afterwards termed by Friedrich Schlegel. We cannot lay too much stress upon the serious influence Herder exercised in this direction. The neglect — I had almost called it contempt — of Latin poetry which to this day exists in German public instruction dates from Herder. In spite of, or perhaps on account of, the injustice and exaggeration of his ideas, they made their way very rapidly; and if to this very day Greek language and literature still continue to form the basis of classical study in Germany, while all other European nations seek it in the Latin tongue and letters; if Homer is read, reread, commented upon, and learnt by heart during a period of six years' study at all German *gymnasien*, while Virgil is only superficially and hastily glanced at, — we

may attribute it entirely to Herder. The whole romantic school, with its contempt for Tasso and Racine, for Pope and Addison, with its enthusiasm for spontaneous, popular authors and productions of primitive ages, stands in indirect relationship to Herder. I have already remarked that F. A. Wolff's *Prolegomena* are contained in embryo within Herder's critical *Sylvæ*, written five-and-twenty years before.

Nor was Herder's example at all less influential with regard to the manner of appreciating, criticising, and enjoying Shakespeare, which was afterwards to prevail in Germany. In translating the English poet, Wieland had softened down and rounded off his asperities and angles, and had, in fact, produced a revised and embellished version of Shakespeare. Lessing, always wrapped up in his favorite Aristotle, had successfully directed all his endeavors towards discovering the observance of the intrinsic laws of dramatic poetry in Shakespeare, and opposing them to the merely external rules which presided over French poetry. Herder's pamphlet on the great dramatist, written at Strasburg, was at once a sequel to, and a reaction against, the *Hamburger Dramaturgie*; for, whereas Lessing imagined he saw, *mutatis mutandis*, a modern Sophocles in Shakespeare, Herder did his best to place the Elizabethan and Periclean poets in direct opposition to one another. He constantly has recourse to history for the explanation of the difference between them. He points out the dignified simplicity of the Greek drama; the one scene occupied at first by chorus and monologue, then the dialogue proceeding from this primitive chorus, the solemnity of the *mise en scène*, the religious nature of the performance and the national festival which gave rise to it. Then turning to the modern stage, "How different," he exclaims, "was the origin of the British drama! Instead of a Greek chorus, Shakespeare found *marionnettes* and showy, effective pieces. It was from humble clay such as this that he formed the sublime creations we have before us. Instead of a simple, homogeneous national and political life, he found a multitude of classes, ways of living, opinions, races, and tongues; and thus it came that he created classes and men, races and tongues, kings and jesters. He found no ancient simplicity like that of the Greeks in history, fable, or action. He there-

fore took history as he found it, and combined the most heterogeneous elements by means of his creative genius. If Shakespeare possessed the divine art of uniting a whole world of the most different scenes into a single action, and if, moreover, this action was to have the semblance of truth, time and place had, also, to be constantly individualized in order to keep up the illusion. Take away time, space, and individuality from man, and you take away the very breath of his soul."

Herder, not content with merely clearing the literary ground of Winckelmann's classical idealism, went a step farther in pursuing him on to his own territory, contesting the truth of his assertion, that the absolute ideal of the beautiful was to be met with in Greece alone, and vigorously attacking the theory of "serene grandeur and lofty simplicity." He demonstrated that if, previously to Winckelmann, things which painting alone could produce had been required of sculpture, it was erring as much in the opposite extreme to apply the laws of sculpture arbitrarily to painting. He was only too right in his views; for the would-be classical school of David and Cornelius, Carstens and Ingres, proceeds directly from Winckelmann; and an entire generation of critics, as well as artists, from Goethe to Canova and Bartolini, adopted this false direction, no one caring to follow Herder on this ground. Goethe, it is true, appeared at the outset inclined to rally to his side, his essay on Gothic art, with reference to the Strasburg Cathedral and its architect, Erwin de Steinbach, being still written in the spirit of Herder's views: "As men think and live, so do they build and dwell." Ancient German painters are raked up from the dust, and Merck, inspired by similar sentiments, encourages Herder in the pursuit in this direction. The eternal and absolute type of the ideal set up by Winckelmann is set aside for the moment. "The ideal, far superior to any special time or race, will remain foreign to, and far remote from, him who binds himself with servility to any particular period, be it in Greece or in France, and who deems the value of such forms to be eternal, abandoning his own living nature for an earthenware mould!" Golden words, which have been too little heeded since. Goethe himself, it is well known, repudiated in after-years the simple, popular style of his earlier productions, of his

"Wandering Jew," and his "Faust," for that of his "Iphigenia," and his "Tasso." He became so exclusive in his classicism with regard to architecture, that, when travelling in Italy, he could not bring himself to look at Florence, that beautiful city of mediæval palaces, nor would he condescend to glance at the Church of San Francisco or the frescos of Giotto at Assisi, having no eyes for anything beyond a small Minerva temple still in preservation there. His *critiques* and essays on painting likewise betray the renegade who has abandoned sounder principles, and merged into a *doctrinaire* of the Winckelmann school. But if Herder's views failed to prevail within the precincts of the history of plastic art, owing to the powerful and yet too recent influence and authority exercised in that department by Winckelmann, at any rate they penetrated rapidly into all other branches of intellectual activity in Germany. The chief conception he sought to inculcate was that of evolution, growth, *fieri*, which he had borrowed from the vegetable kingdom, in order to apply it to the political, religious, and literary history of art. "Rome alone could produce a Winckelmann for art, but Germany is capable of bringing forth a Winckelmann for poetry who would have to accompany his illustrious predecessor a good part of the way." Only a part, however; for the idea of perfection, at which Winckelmann stops short, is not Herder's; the latter admitting no superiority of Sophocles over Homer, of Æschylus over Hesiod, and viewing all ages and styles as equal in value, provided they be original and spontaneous. We should fall into a grave error, however, were we to imagine that he admired primitive poetry alone; for, had this been the case, he would only have been following the erroneous direction of Winckelmann, when he sees perfection in no age but that of Phidias. Herder wished to renovate and revive the intellect by means of regained simplicity and freshness. He thought that simple, spontaneous genius would have the power of doing so in every age, even in our own days, only under a different form from those of ancient times; but he had no contempt whatever for, or wish to dispense with, the benefits of civilization. He makes special reserves on this head. "You smile at me for my enthusiasm for savages almost as contemptuously as Voltaire did at Rousseau

when he admired men who went upon all-fours. Do not imagine that I despise the advantages of civilization and morality on that account. Mankind perform their progressive evolutions in a series of consecutive scenes resembling those of a drama. Woe betide the man who is dissatisfied with that scene in which he is called upon to live and act; but woe betide the philosopher, likewise, who reasons upon humanity and its morals, should he believe his own scene to be the only important one, and the first of all scenes to have been necessarily the worst; for if all form part of the drama which is being progressively performed; it is certain that each will, in turn, exhibit a new and curious side of humanity."

Thus, although he never carried out his intention of writing this history, he preached his doctrines in so many passages of his works, and with so irresistible eloquence, that the world listened to him, — with the exception of a period of ten or fifteen years, when Goethe's and Schiller's classicism was in its bloom, during which, as we have already seen, Herder turned, irritated and soured, from his former disciple. As for himself, he was a reader and a citizen of all ages. He deemed it necessary to know and appreciate the poetry of other countries, in order to be able duly to appreciate that of one's own; and that to be able to do this properly, it was indispensable that one should place one's self in the *milieu* which had produced it. Now, nature had endowed him for this purpose with a pliability of intelligence, an acuteness of perception, a keenness of sight and hearing, and a refined delicacy totally unrivalled. This faculty of relishing and entering into the spirit of the most diverse countries and periods constitutes his chief and true grandeur. This was in reality his cosmopolitanism, which has been so often misrepresented, and about which a legion of historians have been content to repeat stereotyped judgments, without attempting to subject them to the slightest criticism or control. But this cosmopolitanism never for a moment prevented him from being the most German of all German writers in the general tone of his inspiration, still less from heralding the German idea to the world at large. In fact, Herder not only put an end to the remnants of reasoning, didacticism, and moralizing which Lessing had still admitted

into the domain of poetry, leaving nothing at all beyond the arbitrary inspirations of the poet, but he also rose up against the idea of *rule*, which Lessing defended, in opposition to the essentially German conception of *individualism*. He gave back, if I may say so, its originality to German poetry, by putting a limit to the imitation of the ancients.

"We shall be false Romans," he says eloquently, "in language, philosophy, mythology; in the ode, in didactic verse, in the elegy, satire or eloquence, from the moment that we strive to be Romans only, — to be Horace, Lucretius, and Cicero!" It was certainly not his fault if Germany did not entirely go back to the interrupted traditions of the sixteenth century, to Luther and Hans Sachs, as it seemed disposed to do from 1770 to 1780, instead of again taking to imitation of the ancients, — a freer and truer one, it is true, than that of old, but nevertheless an imitation. "O, that accursed word *classical*!" he exclaims. "It would have made a classical orator of Cicero, poets of the classical school of Horace and Virgil, a pedant of Cæsar, and a rhetorician of Titus Livius. It has separated the thought and its expression from the opportunity which gave rise to it. It is this word which prevents us from forming ourselves after the ancients as they were when they lived; this word which has invented the absurd glory of being a *connaisseur* of the ancients without having any further object in view; this word has buried more than one genius beneath ruins of words, made a chaos of strange expression of his head, and has carried off from our country many a blossoming tree which promised to yield fruit. . . . Let us therefore be *idiomatic* writers; let us be original; let us write for our own people in our own tongue. Let us leave it to posterity to decide whether we be classical or not."

He deplores for his country the interruption of the national tradition, without insisting upon a return to Arminius and the Cherusci who lived assuredly less in the popular memory of the Germany than Achilles and his myrmidons.

"We absolutely do not possess a single scrap of living poetry belonging to ancient times from which our modern poetry could have put forth as the branch does from the stem," he says, alluding to Klopstock's unfortunate attempts at regener-

ating primitive Teutonic mythology and history. "Other nations, on the contrary, have progressed with the ages, developing out of national productions on their native soil, and out of the remnants of the past on the foundation of popular belief and popular taste. Hence it is that their poetry and language became national. Whereas we poor Germans were destined never to remain true to ourselves. Our song is the cry of Pan, an echo of the days of the Jordan, the Tiber, the Thames, and the Seine; our very spirit is a hired one, ruminating what others have trodden under foot. And now that we are just beginning at last to have a poetry of our own, now that German courts are beginning to spell in German and to pronounce a few German names, good heavens! what important personages we think ourselves! How barbarous would that man appear in our eyes who should trouble himself about the 'coarse' people, and its vulgar food of tales, prejudices (superstitions), songs, and rude expressions! How he would defile the purity of our classical literature, so precise in its prosody! He would indeed be the owl amidst the brilliant, melodious throng of songsters; and yet, it will remain an eternal truth that the part of any literature which concerns the people must be popular on pain of becoming a classical bubble. It will remain an eternal truth, that we can have neither public, nation, language, nor poetry of our own living and acting within us, without the people. We do nothing but write for the sage and the scholar. We compose odes, heroic poems, songs for the church,—or may be for the kitchen,—of a kind that nobody understands, feels, or relishes. Our whole classical literature is a bird of paradise, gaudy in plumage, spruce in appearance, all soaring, all elevation, but having no footing on the German soil!"

It is easy to conceive what must have been the effect produced by such bold assertions as these, at a time when the nation imagined itself to have left the golden age behind it, because, forsooth, it had succeeded in producing a few correct rhymers and an inspired imitator of Milton; and we need not be at a loss to comprehend why Herder should cordially greet any truly spontaneous emanations from the national soul, were they even such mediocre productions as the *Grenadier Songs*, with which the Seven Years' War inspired Vater Gleim. The

sensation produced by these new doctrines was incalculable, not only upon the rising poetry of Germany, which took its inspirations exclusively from them, not only upon philology and classical instruction, as I have already stated, but upon every branch of science, regenerating and invigorating in every direction. To quote a single example of this extraordinary influence, Herder's ideas upon the origin of language itself were destined to become laws, and, in fact, the works of Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm von Humboldt are a mere development of them; indeed, the whole of our modern linguistic science, and especially of Teutonic philology, proceeds directly from Herder. When he maintained that "language was nothing but the superior development of reason, and that it was a natural product of the intellectual powers of mankind," was he not giving utterance to an idea which has since prevailed over the opinions of those who deemed it to be a special revelation, as well as of those who regarded it as a rational, conscious invention? Now, this one idea alone has become the starting-point and condition *sine qua non* of all true linguistic science.

These and other analogous notions besides introduced a completely new way of writing history, and may be said to have created the philosophy of history. It was already something to have influenced a Goethe so far as to induce him to forsake the direction he had taken at Leipzig and leave pastoral poetry *à la Française* for the more vigorous and popular style he adopted in his *Götz*, his *Lieder*, *Hans Sachs' Mission*, the *Wandering Jew*, and in the first scenes of his *Faust*; it was something to have brought forth a school of philologists like Heyne and Wolff, — for both proceed from him; but Herder did still more: he regenerated the science of history in Germany, and caused the historical point of view to prevail in every other branch of science; first of all, in literary history, which till then had been a mere series of biographies, or a catalogue of works with analyses, and which, from that time forward, became what it always should be, an exposition of the gradual growth and development of ideas and literary forms in the relationship they bear towards the general civilization of a nation. Herder saw as clearly as M. Taine the close connection existing between the innate character and the climatic and historic

circumstances of a people on the one hand, and its intellectual productions on the other.

“The sphere of general taste must always differ,” he says, “according to the difference of the times, although the same laws are always acting; for the materials and aims are constantly changing. . . . A worthy man who sees the world only through the medium of the market, the *café*, or the *Hamburg Correspondence*, is always surprised, when he stumbles upon an historical work, to find that tastes and ways of thinking change with climates, zones, and countries. Paris is not more amazed when some Indian prince appears. His astonishment usually resolves itself into a hearty laugh. ‘What fables books contain!’ he exclaims; ‘who is to believe all this?’ At times, again, he will admit the truth of such things, but then he looks upon those nations as mad; and why? because they think differently from what his mamma, his worthy nurse, and his wise companions have taught him to think. Do we not often render ourselves guilty of this defect when we pronounce the way of thinking of savages absurd or incredible, simply because it is not our own? Do we not laugh at the Chinese for considering their own country as the centre of the world, and placing us poor inhabitants of the globe at the four corners of it, like so many monsters and caricatures? Why? Because they did not know us, and believed themselves to possess the monopoly of wisdom and taste. How often is one tempted to think one’s self in China when one hears certain Chinese appreciations in every-day life, which, through ignorance or pride, anathematize all that is at variance with our own way of thinking and understanding!”

Herder carried the same spirit into what is properly called history. An abyss separates him from the historians of his time as well as from men of erudition, such as Schlözer and Spittler, as from painters of history, like Schiller and Johannes von Müller, all four in reality his juniors, but in appearance his seniors by a century at least. That father of modern history, as understood in our age, Niebuhr, was the first historian who wrote with Herder’s views; the first who was able to feel the beat of the nation’s pulse whose vicissitudes he undertook to release. We have traced the origin of Herder’s “Ideas of a

Philosophy of Mankind" to the first impressions he imbibed at Riga, and on his voyage on the Baltic Sea and Northern Ocean. However incomplete this work may be, it made an epoch in German literature. It is still written in the same poetical style which caused even his friend Hamann to shrug his shoulders, and which renders his critical studies so indigestible to a soberer generation. Besides, as in his literary *critiques*, he never directs his attacks upon details and errors of fact, but upon the general point of view, so also generality dominates in his "Philosophy of History." We find here, not exactly allegories in the Platonic acceptation, nor the prophetic visions to be met with in his earlier works, but still the same vagueness pervading the whole; general ideas have always more importance for him than positive facts. Herder's science and that of his time was incomplete, and the philosopher therefore frequently arrives at hasty conclusions. But there is one principal fact in his writings which made itself felt long after: Herder placed the history of civilization far above political history. M. Guizot's chief work would have been impossible without Herder's precedent. Up to his time the most mechanical teleology had reigned in history as in philosophy, and Providence was represented to have created cork-trees that men should have where-withal to stop their bottles; as also, of course, to have prevented Cromwell from setting out for America, in order that an instrument might not be wanting to accomplish the Revolution in England. Herder was the first who ventured to leave the alleged aims of Providence in historical events out of the question, and, opposing himself alike to the idea of a preconceived plan and that of mere chance in history, refused to see anything in it beyond the development of given germs, — which has undoubtedly proved the most fertile of all modern ideas. "Each nation contains its centre within itself, as a bullet its centre of gravity. There is nothing within the whole kingdom of God which is a mere *means*; everything is at once *means* and *end*. . . . The God I look for in history must be the same as the God of nature; for man is but a tiny particle of the whole, and the history of mankind resembles that of the worm closely connected with the tissue it inhabits; therefore, the natural laws by which the Deity reveals itself must reign in man likewise."

All this singularly resembles pantheism, and these are words which Herder would most certainly not have penned while at Bückeberg, at the time when he made his first rough sketch of his "Philosophy of History." But since then, he, like Lessing, Goethe, and nearly all the eminent minds of the age, had tasted of Spinoza and relished him extremely. In spite of the scandal produced among believers by this change, Herder never renounced his new faith. He sought to conceal it, as much from himself as from others, and in order to do this he put much into Christianity which does not really belong to it, as many others before and since have done. "The pearl is found," he says; "no one can build upon any other foundation than that of Christ. As this gospel needs no external sign, being its own proof, neither can it be overthrown by theological or other doubts. . . . The seed is sown, and it contains strength enough in itself to become the tree which is to shelter all nations under its foliage. Every sort of temperature, good or bad, must be favorable to its growth. In all events which occur in the world, it is its kingdom which is coming. For this is the business of Providence; and it is the aim and character, the very essence, of the human race to accomplish Providence's work. Place no trust in phantoms. The kingdom of God is within you."

This religion, we see, was a wide one, and this species of Christianity very closely resembled the doctrines of Spinoza. But it was precisely in virtue of the peculiar wideness of his Christianity that Herder exercised so great an influence over his country. If the German people be the only one which has remained deeply religious without paying any great attention to exterior worship and religious observance, it merely followed the example which Herder gave it. "The question has been raised," he said, "whether a man can be moral without religion. Independently of religious dogma is doubtless what was meant, for otherwise this question would be resolved by itself. True religion cannot exist without morality, and true morality is religion under whatever form it may show itself." This, translated into Luther's language, means that faith goes before works. The man who lives in the ideal cannot be immoral. As far from orthodoxy as from rationalism, Herder

constantly appeals from dogma and reasoning to religious feeling: "Flee religious controversy as you would the pest. For it is impossible to dispute about what religion is. It is as impossible either to deny or affirm it by discussion as to paint the mind or hear light." It is precisely because Christianity is an especially humane religion that Herder himself is a Christian, not at all because he is particularly attached to any dogma.

Herder's religious development is very characteristic of Germany in the past century. The Bible, as we have already seen, was the earliest source of his intellectual culture. At an early age, however, he rebels against the idea of its being a revealed book. The Book of Genesis became in his eyes a species of Theogony, like that of Hesiod, nor could he see anything beyond a collection of national poetical effusions in the rest of the Old Testament. What he discovers in it above all is poetry; and we find him defending the Song of Solomon as energetically against mystics as against moralizing rationalists. It is necessary to read his eloquent pages on the Mosaic epopee in order to understand the effect which they produced in their apparent profane treatment of the subject, which Herder and his countrymen looked upon, on the contrary, as a new form of admiration. "Burn all rationalistic metaphysics!" he exclaims; "the living commentary on the Mosaic monument blows with the morning air." Herder it was who first taught the world to understand the Oriental way of thinking, who first showed it what Oriental poetry was, and opposed the primitive simplicity of the Bible to the dogmatic interpretation of theologians. "What other people of antiquity had a voice so pure and so powerful as Israel's prophets? What Greek or Roman poets are there whom we could place by the side of an Isaiah, from the point of view of a pure and sublime morality, or that of a wide, elevated national mind?" Herder, in his two celebrated Biblical works, did but develop the germ of those ideas which he had received from his teacher and friend, Hamann, ten or fifteen years before. "What are all the *miracula speciosa* of an Odyssey and an Iliad," the Königsberg Magus had written to him, "compared with the simple, grand life of the patriarchs? What is the gentle, loving soul of the blind bard of Mæonia compared with the soul of a Moses, ardent with the

consciousness of his own exploits and inflated with lofty inspirations ? ”

These ideas, which Herder brought forward for the first time in his “ *Most Ancient Document* ” (1774), which “ he had cherished in his heart from his tenderest infancy,” were taken up again and developed still further, ten years later, in the “ *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* ” (1784). He never tires of telling the world that the Bible is not only the basis of our own religion, but also contains that which is the most elevated and most ancient in the world. At that time the Vedas had not been discovered. It was Herder who opened the world’s eyes anew to that poetry which had been hidden from its view by the mass of allegory, morals, dogmas, philosophical ideas, and law-texts with which it had been stifled. Herder had the boldness to treat the Bible like any other human document ; and by doing so, he made the history of religions, which belongs essentially and exclusively to our age, possible ; for nothing less than the example of Herder’s deep and sincere religious feeling would have sufficed to enable men to study religion itself without placing themselves at the point of view of any given religion. The various forms under which mankind have successively or simultaneously tried to satisfy their craving for the infinite and the supernatural had to be duly respected and loved ; but the point at which the believer no longer requires that the infinite and supernatural should have a definite conventional form, in order to adore and dread it, had also to be reached. An enthusiastic nature like Herder’s, capable of understanding a mystical glow, and yet free-thinking enough not to attribute to himself and his sect alone the privilege of such mystical glow and the immediate conception of the Deity, was required. The Tübingen school would have been an impossibility without Herder, and we may say exactly the same thing with regard to its adversaries. Ewald would never have written his “ *History of the People of Israel*,” Bunsen would never have composed his great “ *Bible-Work*,” nor his “ *God in History*,” if Herder had not opened out fresh horizons. His theologico-political thoughts were already those of young Schelling. D. F. Strauss drew his idea of myths and legends, which has transformed religious history entirely, from Herder. Even Renan finds himself still upon ground

which Herder had conquered ; respect and sympathy for religion is here allied to an independence of view which regards all religions as issuing from the same religious want felt by men, and which puts inner revelation in the place of outer. Herder no longer explains the origin of positive religion, as it was customary to do in the philosophical camp, by the imposture of the priests, but historically. First, he sees fear and superstition ; then curiosity creating cosmogonies, and, with the aid of poetical imagination, mythologies. He shows that religious ideas only become simplified, generalized, and purified by degrees. In the beginning they could only be instinctive, intuitive, sentient, and consequently local and determined.

“ It was natural that these traditions should be more national than anything else in the world. Every one spoke through the mouth of his forefathers. He saw by the standard of the world which surrounded him. He gave himself solutions concerning the problems which interested him most, and these explanations were those best adapted to his climate, nationality, and ideas. He drew his conclusions according to his interest and his views, according to the language and the customs of his country. The world and humanity were therefore organized in his eyes according to the ideas of his own time, nation, and civilization ; everything in them was national and local, from the greatest to the smallest thing. Scandinavia built a world of giants, the Iroquois made the turtle the machine which explained to him the existence of the earth.”

The whole of modern religious criticism, its fertility as well as its perils, is contained in these words, — for how should a grosser mind, a less poetical, less respectful soul than Herder’s translate all this otherwise than by the words of the scoffer *par excellence* ? — “ God created man after his own image, and man gave it him back.” Nor are gross minds, prosy, irreverential souls, less numerous among the defenders of, than among the detractors from, positive religion. Hence the great unpopularity of Herder and his disciples in both camps.

It is usual to call Herder the apostle of humanitarian ideas, and not without reason, provided a contempt for nationalities be not implied. Herder placed humanity above nationality. In his eyes the title man was the noblest which can be im-

aged; and he belongs entirely to his essentially optimist age by this very exalted idea of man. In his eyes national prejudices were as contemptible as were religious and caste prejudices. He thought that the day would come when a single bond would unite all peoples, when a single, unwritten religion, a single civilization, a single morality, would bring men together in a common brotherhood. He protested vehemently against national exclusiveness, as he protested against every other species of exclusiveness. He did not wish that any people, not even his own, should be trumpeted forth as the elect; but he was not the less full of love and reverence for his country on that account. "National pride," he said, "is absurd, ridiculous, and dangerous; but it is every one's duty to love his country, and it cannot be loved if it is not honored, if it is despised and allowed to be disparaged; it must be defended, and each of us must contribute the utmost in his power to its honor and its welfare." Far from being a despiser of his native country, Herder was, perhaps, the most, I had almost said the only, patriotic German writer of the last century, as he undoubtedly was the one who understood best the degradation, and who most deplored the fragmentary condition, the slavery, and the political *décadence* of Germany. He laments that Germany was but "a thing of the imagination," that she had no "general voice," that there was no Frederick the Second seated upon the worm-eaten throne of the German Empire. And as, in opposition to Schiller, he desired that poetry should seek her inspirations in real life, and not in the ideal world, he likewise desired, in opposition to Goethe, that this reality should be that of public, not always that of private life. In particular his "Letters on Humanity," especially the first, are full of these political and patriotic ideas. But it would be unjust not to add, that, in his eyes, the nation was but a "member of humanity." He asked that nations should exercise a mutual influence over each other by means of their moral and intellectual qualities only, and saw in a "free competition of activity of the most different nationalities the fundamental condition of the civilization of mankind." And this man it is who, thanks to some ill-comprehended sentence of a speech made in his youth, and thanks especially to the error by which the ideas he professed with re-

gard to literature have been attributed to him likewise on political subjects, has had the misfortune to become "the apostle of cosmopolitism" in the eyes of posterity. One ought far rather to say that, after having been the standard-bearer of the revolt of the Germanic against the Latin spirit of the eighteenth century, by his literary criticism, he was at once the first and most eloquent defender of that great nationality principle which has agitated our own century so deeply. By restoring national poetry to its place of honor, he contributed to the revival of patriotic sentiments; by formulating the German idea, he became the forerunner of those who, long after, created the German state. It is this universality, this breadth of horizon, which constitutes the real greatness of Herder. Understanding nationality as no one else in the century did and subordinating it to humanity, brought up in reverence for Hellenism and the first to point out its true character, he discovered the East by intuition; in heart a Christian, he knew how to assimilate all the pagan "humanism" in the Renaissance; full of admiration and intelligence for the classical authors, he found the secret of primitive and religious poetry; liberal in his political sympathies, he demonstrated the legality and undeviating consistency of history; and Goethe might well say of his friend and initiator, "He who looks upon the cause of humanity as his own has taken a part in the affairs of the gods and of fate."

Herder's ideas have penetrated our whole method of thinking in such a degree, his works are so incomplete and so disconnected, that it is hardly possible for us to account for the extraordinary effect these ideas and works produced in their day, or for the surprising influence exercised by Herder personally. From his twenty-fifth year he was indeed a sovereign. True, his actual and uncontested sway was not prolonged beyond a period of fifteen years, albeit his name still figured long after on the list of living potentates. The generation of the *Stürmer* and *Dränger*, or, as they were pleased to denominate themselves, the "original geniuses," looked up to Herder as their leader and their prophet. They turned from him later on, and went back to the exclusive worship of classical antiquity; but their very manner of doing homage to it bore witness to Herder's influence. The following generation threw itself no less exclusively

into the Middle Ages ; but, after all, what was it doing but following Herder's example when it raked up Dantes and Calderons out of the dust in order to confront them with and oppose them to Virgils and Racines ? However they might repudiate, nay, even forget their teacher, his doctrines already pervaded the whole intellectual atmosphere of Germany, and men's minds breathed them in with the very air they inhaled.

Herder is certainly neither a classical nor a finished writer ; he has gone singularly out of fashion, because his style is pompous and diffuse, his composition loose and disconnected, because his reasoning lacks firmness, and his erudition solidity. Still we repeat, that no other German writer of note toward the end of the last century exercised the important indirect influence which it was Herder's privilege to do. Niebuhr, in revealing to us the growth of Rome, the birth of her religious and national legends, the gradual but slow formation of her marvellous constitution, the struggle between patricians and plebeians in this small municipal republic, so similar to that of his dear Ditmarsia ; F. A. Wolff, when he points out to us the process of epic poetry ; Savigny, when he proves that masterpiece of human ingenuity, the Roman civil law, not to have been the work of a wise legislator, but rather the wisdom of generations and of centuries ; A. W. Schlegel and his school, when they transplanted the poetry of other nations to Germany by means of imitations which are real masterpieces of assimilation ; his brother Friedrich, when, in the "Wisdom of the Hindoos," he opens out that vast field of comparative linguistic science which Bopp and Lassen and so many others have since cultivated ; W. von Humboldt, when he established the laws of language ; and J. Grimm, when he brought German philology into existence, while his brother made a science of Northern mythology ; still later on, D. F. Strauss, when, in our own days, he places the myth and the legend with their unconscious origin and growth, not alone in opposition to the Divinity intervening to interrupt established order, but also to the imposture of conscious fraud ; Otfried Müller, when he proves that Greek mythology, far from containing historical facts or moral sentences, is the involuntary personification of surrounding nature, subsequently developed by the imagination ; or when he

shows us one or several legislators satisfied to compile and codify the customs of their country in the place of the traditional Lycurgus taught us in our school-days, who is represented as inventing a constitution after the fashion of the Abbé Sieyès; Adalbert Kuhn and Max Müller, when they erect the new science of comparative mythology upon the basis of comparative linguistics, — what else are they doing but applying and working out Herder's ideas? And if we turn our eyes towards other nations, what else are Benjamin Constant, De Tocqueville, Renan, Taine, Carlyle, and Darwin doing, each in his own particular branch, but applying and developing Herder's two fundamental principles, i. e., that of organic evolution and that of the entirety of the individual? It was Herder, indeed, who discovered the true spirit of history, and in this sense it is that Goethe was able to say of him, when personifying him with his *Humanus*: —

“Ein edler Mann, begierig zu ergründen
 Wie überall der Menschen Sinn entspiesst,
 Horcht in die Welt so Ton als Wort zu finden
 Das tausendquellig durch die Länder fließt;
 Die ältesten, die neuesten Regionen
 Durchwandelt er und lauscht in allen Zonen.
 .
 Wo sich's versteckte, wusst' er's aufzufinden,
 Trübschaft verhüllt, verkleidet leicht als Spiel:
 Im höchsten Sinn der Zukunft zu begründen
 Humanität sei unser ewig Ziel!” *

KARL HILLEBRAND.

* A noble mind, desirous of fathoming
 Man's soul in whatsoever direction it may shoot forth,
 Searcheth throughout the universe for sound and word
 Which flow through the lands in thousand sources,
 Wanders through the oldest as the newest regions,
 And listens in every zone.

He knew how to find it wherever it lay hid,
 Whether robed in grave disguise, or lightly clothed in the garb of play,
 In order to found for the future this lofty rule:
 Humanity be our eternal aim!